
BRIDGES

WORLD
FELLOWSHIP
OF YMCA
RETIREES
(WFYR)



July 2026
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KOHEI YAMADA **FROM THE CHAIR**



The Past Four Years. The Next Four Years. What We Have Hoped for Through WFYR

In July 2022, the WFYR General Conference was held in Denmark, and already four years have passed. During these years, I have strongly felt that retired YMCA staff take great pride in their years of service and continue to ask themselves how they can support and strengthen the YMCA's mission even after retirement.

Many are no longer working professionally, yet still wish to contribute to society in meaningful ways. Those who choose to work for the YMCA are often people who have wanted to make the world a better place, and such people have formed the heart of the retirees' movement over the years.

Many retirees still want to do something useful for society and to do it together with others in a spirit of fellowship and joy. I believe this is

one of the defining characteristics of the retirees' movement. WFYR has been created and sustained by such people. Beyond fellowship within each country, retirees have also found joy in building friendships across national borders, and these international connections have continued to deepen and expand.

The WFYR General Conference, held every four years alongside the YMCA World Council, has become an important opportunity for this global fellowship. In the Asia-Pacific region alone, for example, there are YMCAs in 25 countries, though active retirees' movements may exist in only five or six of them.

Many people naturally move away from the YMCA after retirement. Yet many still feel, "I want to do something for people, for society, and for those in need." WFYR provides a place where such people can gather, share their experiences, encourage one another, and build friendships.

The WFYR World Conference especially allows us to feel the strength of our international connection. From the beginning, WFYR has aimed to raise funds so that retirees from every region of the world can participate in this gathering.

Over the past four years, WFYR has held four leadership meetings each year and continued the *Secours Speciaux* fund, an emergency support system that has provided assistance to retirees five or six times annually. We have also introduced the Global Retirement Initiative (GRI) to YMCAs in countries without pension systems, helping them gradually establish sustainable retirement support programs over a five-year period.

In addition, through our twice-yearly virtual gatherings, members have had opportunities to hear from YMCA leaders worldwide.

Over the past four years, this spirit has continued to inspire new forms of service and fellowship, even after retirement. I sincerely hope that over the next four years, this spirit will grow even wider and deeper throughout the worldwide YMCA retirees' movement.

Kohei

Kohei Yamada is Chair of the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees



*Bridges Editors **Len and Joyce Wilson** enjoy a cup of java with WFYR Past Chair **Phil Dwyer** and his wife, **Debbie**, at a past WFYR World Conference.*

LEN AND JOYCE WILSON **FROM THE EDITORS**

Dear friends in WFYR: It is with both sad and happy hearts that your editors announce new leadership in the editing of *Bridges*. We will be turning over the responsibility for the publication to Craig Altschul and Peggi Simmons during the World Conference in Toronto.

For almost 20 years, we have shared so many of your heartwarming stories and delighted in the photos that brought them to life. Part of that memory is also the evolution of your newsletter, then under Adrian Moody's care and direction.

At that time, it was an eight-page printed document that we folded and placed in envelopes for mailing. Later, the Philadelphia Metropolitan YMCA handled printing and mailing costs, as part of its World Service contribution, and one of its employees, Cathy Fromm, volunteered her proofreading skills. Once it was ready for distribution, we folded, sealed, and placed labels on each newsletter to be mailed.

For nearly a decade, however, *Bridges* has been part of the modern age, designed and distributed electronically under the eyes and artistry of Craig and Peggi. Readership has expanded dramatically under the direction of Ken White, as mailing costs and labor have been essentially eliminated.

That's where the happy part comes in. Having worked with Craig and Peggi, we have absolute confidence that your beloved *Bridges* is not only in good hands but in a place where you are certain to witness improvements at all levels.

This last edition of *Bridges* under our direction attempts *to capture* glimpses of friends and events during several of those preceding years of WFYR events.

Special thanks to Jerry Prado Shaw and Don Anderson, among others, who have shared their experiences with us and have provided photos that bring back wonderful memories. Jerry and Don are two of WFYR's earliest leaders and were involved in international service projects before and after their Y retirements.

As we reviewed the newsletter files, it seems that *Bridges* readers enjoyed learning a bit about the origins and achievements of our organization, as well as about significant YMCA leaders.

WFYR has an incredible history and the potential to expand its membership and the number of affiliated countries. We look forward to seeing it grow and reading more about it in future editions of *Bridges*.

Now that the scene has been set, we want to share pictures of gatherings and friends who met and worked together for more than two decades. Along the way, they learned to have fun together, as did we. Thank you for an incredible journey.

Len and Joyce

Bridges Editors



*Top: Five past WFYR chairs share some memories at the Thailand WFYR Conference. L-R: **Pres Johnson, Don Anderson, Phil Dwyer, Norris Lineweaver, and Jerry Prado Shaw.** Bottom L-R: WFYR's third chair **Adrian Moody** and wife, **Fran**; WFYR Chair-Elect 2026-2030 **Helene Weir.***

THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

A BIT OF WFYR AND BRIDGES HISTORY



WFYR was dedicated in a ceremony led by **Joel Nystrom** at Geneva Park YMCA Conference Center in Canada with the words, *“On this day the 28th of September 1994, we launch the World Fellowship of YMCA Retirees.”*

The WFYR logo shown on the first and all succeeding issues of WFYR’s newsletter shows the traditional YMCA emblem, but places special emphasis upon WFYR’s worldwide concept through an elongated oval map of the world. WFYR groups in all countries were encouraged to use this emblem.

William A. McAllister was selected as WFYR's first chair in 1994. At that time, the organization included members in 11 countries on six continents.

The very first newsletter also invited all chapters to suggest a name for WFYR's newsletter. **John Fisher**, the newsletter's first editor, finally announced, "*Bridges received the majority of votes cast, so henceforth the official name is Bridges. Thanks to all who sent a total of 59 names.*"

On October 12-16, 1997, the Weatherford Chapter of the then-named North American Fellowship of YMCA Retirees (now YMCA Alumni) hosted 475 YMCA retirees and spouses from 18 countries and six continents at WFYR's first world conference. This, the largest of any YMCA retiree gathering, was held at Blue Ridge Assembly, the YMCA Conference Center in North Carolina's Blue Ridge mountains, colorful in its autumn foliage.

Prescott K. Johnson was elected WFYR Chair and announced that WFYR had 37 delegates from all six continents, including Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Great Britain, India, Japan, Kenya, and Mexico.

In 1999, the year **Nicholas Nightingale** took up the reins of World Alliance Secretary General, it was announced that *Bridges* was reaching 80 countries: 27 in Europe, 16 in Africa, 11 in Latin America, 5 in the Caribbean, 5 in the Pacific, and 3 in North America. Of the 80 countries, 27 had identified member affiliation.

In March of 2000, **Peter Gabel**, Associate Editor, stepped up to lead *Bridges*, succeeding John. When John Fisher passed later that year, **John O'Melia** noted that John had been a major facilitator in helping achieve the WFYR objective of fostering a spirit of Christian fellowship, communication, and mutual support on the world level.

WFYR's second World Conference was held at Estes Park, Colorado USA. It was announced that **Adrian Moody** would assume a new position as First Vice Chair and Secretary-Treasurer, with the expectation that he would assume the WFYR chair position in 2003.

The December 2005 edition of *Bridges* noted that **Peter** would be leaving his role as editor. **Adrian Moody** expressed "heartfelt thanks to Peter for his accomplishments in maintaining *Bridges* "as the most appreciated WFYR component."

A few issues of *Bridges* were published while Adrian and others on the leadership team sought a replacement for Peter. Adrian was a dear friend of **Len and Joyce Wilson**, the current editors, and had often written about his trips to Jerusalem while they were serving there, as well as about some experiences they shared while he and Len were together on the national staff.

Shortly after Len's retirement, Adrian invited **Len and Joyce** out for a cup of coffee "*since he happened to be in the area.*" That cup of coffee turned into nearly 20 years of WFYR fellowship and inspiration, as the Wilsons worked with some of the greatest Y retirees worldwide to bring you *Bridges*.

The following are all WFYR chairs from 1994 to the present: **William A. McAllister** 1994-1997, **Prescott Johnson**, 1997- 2003, **Adrian Moody** 2003-2006, **Don Anderson** 2006-2010, **Jerry Prado Shaw** 2010-2014, **Norris Lineweaver**, 2014-2018, **Phil Dwyer**, 2018-2022, **Kohei Yamada**, 2022-2026, and to be installed in Toronto in 2026, **Helene Weir**.

BRIDGES CONNECTS ACROSS WORLD



in *Bridges'* early days.

Your editors are grateful to the various newsletters and individuals who supply news, photos, and messages of inspiration. And, we thank the YMCA of Philadelphia for providing essential support

Included publications are Canada's **TieLines**, Great Britain's **Y's Retired of the UK**, USA YMCA Alumni's **The Connection**, Germany's YMCA **Senior Initiative** publications, and Brazil's **Arca de Noe**.

A PHOTO TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE **REMEMBERING WFYR GATHERINGS**



*Looking back. at WFYR Conferences: Top L-R: **Hong Kong, 2010;**
Estes Park, Colorado, USA, 2014. Bottom L-R: **Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2018;**
Aarhus, Denmark, 2022.*



Top row L-R: Marlene and Kohei Yamada, Franco Savoie, and Juan Simoes. Bottom row: Bonnie Mairs gets an elephant kiss; LACA ladies let Jerry Prado Shaw photo bomb their snapshot: L-R Alicia Sanjurjo, (Jerry), Clara Arteaga, Martha Prado, Ana Crisaldo, and Miriam Pedroza.



Top row: Margaret Ozdyk and Albrecht Kaul; an African Retirees delegation to WFYR. Bottom row: Making the point on t-shirts that "we're retired, but not tired," and Chris Caparoso.

DON ANDERSON BRINGING PAST INTO FUTURE

WFYR has had steady growth since its inception. Prior to 2010, when we first met as part of the World Council in Hong Kong, WFYR was an adjunct to the meeting of the North American retirees.

When we moved to meeting at the World Council in 2010, it made WFYR visible to the active YMCA movement. WFYR's role became a real and significant part of the YMCA World. This was amplified when WFYR launched its Global Retirement Initiative (GRI) simultaneously.



Over time, the WFYR meetings have moved from being mostly fellowship to include more content and connection to the active movement. In the coming years, we need to be conscious of the balance between reuniting with old friends in fellowship and our connection and usefulness to the Y movement.

In the future, WFYR will face challenges in recruiting newly retired YMCA staff, as the YMCA has more short-term employees than lifelong, spiritually committed ones. We will need to find a way to connect with strong YMCA leaders just before they retire in an intentional recruitment effort.

It will also be important to engineer our leadership team to balance global representation with access to resources.

Don Anderson is a past WFYR chair living in Honolulu, HI, USA. Don will be inducted into the USA YMCA Hall of Fame in September.

GOODWILL WISHES TO ALL



WFYR delegates are now preparing for an upcoming World Conference, where they will connect with old friends, meet new ones, and consider the organization's direction for the next four years. It is fitting for this issue of *Bridges*, which looks back with nostalgia to what was, and into the

future with hope and enthusiasm, to share generous goodwill wishes from Y Retirees in Germany to companions around the world (image).

Next Bridges issue: Fall 2026



[WFYR Leaders](#)

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